# MY CONVERSION

By

## REV. F. X. FARMER, S.J.

*Formerly Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and Missionary to China under the Christian and Missionary Alliance.*

New York
THE PAULIST PRESS
401 West 59th Street

# MY CONVERSION.

By F. X. Farmer, S.J.

WAS born at Conyers, Georgia, October 14, 1877, and while still very young my parents moved to Covington, where my father engaged in the mercantile business and where I passed the years of my childhood and young manhood.

I was reared with the greatest possible care, never being allowed to visit or play with other children promiscuously; and when I did make or receive occasional visits, my parents were solicitous as to the kind of companions I had. My father, a thorough business man and at that time not identified with any church, left the religious training of the children in the hands of my mother, who was indeed capable of it, as she was a good and devout woman. How often in winter evenings. after having heard my evening prayer,

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep," etc.,

tucked me snugly in my little bed and extinguished the light, have I seen her kneeling or sitting before the fireplace, whose dying embers filled the room with a ruddy glow—motionless and recollected in prayer. With such an example before my eyes added to holy counsel and teaching, my young heart was early impressed with divine things, so that I do not remember a time when I did not

fear and love God. But there are certain marked epochs in my life when important decisions were made and love for Christ grew greater, stronger and more real.

Now, the first one of these decisions was made when I was about twelve years of age. My mother, a good Methodist, generally took or sent my younger brother and me to church every Sunday morning and to Sunday School in the afternoon. I also attended special services held for children during revivals or "protracted meetings," and there I was most deeply impressed by what I heard concerning sin and its everlasting punishment in Hell, the Love, Passion and Death of Our Lord, and the glorious reward and happiness of the good in Heaven. On such occasions, when an invitation was given, I went forward to the altar-rail, to be prayed for and to confess to God my childish sins, for which I wept much and made resolutions to be good. Seeing the other children joining the Church and being baptized awakened the same desire in my heart and, before twelve years old, I had asked my mother several times to permit me to do likewise. But she thought I should wait until I was older and could appreciate better the significance of such an action. This is easily understood when one considers how many Protestants regard Baptism only as a sign, and in no wise necessary for salvation. But I did not want to delay, and I finally obtained permission to join the Methodist Church.

I began my first studies at six years of age, in a private school, and continued to attend private schools until I was about eleven or twelve years old; then I entered the public grammar school. I was of a timid, sensitive nature, and had a tender conscience, consequently I was filled with horror many times at the profanity and obscenity of the boys. My mother's injunction, not to remain in company with boys whose conversations and actions were bad, together with a fear of offending God, won for me many a taunt and mockery, and made me feel,

even at that age, how narrow and lonely is the way of righteousness. But God's grace was with me, and the moral battles and victories of those days were the formation and strengthening of the soul for greater difficulties later on. During this time I was faithful to my Christian duties, such as constant attendance at church, Sunday School, reading the Holy Scriptures, daily prayers, etc.; besides I was a member of the Juvenile Missionary Society. My father being well-off desired to give me a good education; so at fifteen or sixteen years of age I began to study at Emory College, only two miles distant from Covington. I continued there until I had completed the required course and received my diploma of B. Ph. degree. The college being a Methodist institution, its general tone was religious, and there were in both faculty and student body many earnest Christians. Dr. Warren Candler was then president, and was consecrated Bishop of the Methodist Church in 1898, the year of my graduation. His lectures and sermons, with those of Dr. Dickey, certainly had a strong formative influence upon my intellectual and religious life.

It was during my student days at Emory, while in the Junior class, that there came to me a deepening of my religious ideas and a formal and definite decision concerning life's work. What a vast difference between a youth of twelve and a young man of nineteen! Those intervening years had been passed in a manner faithful and true to God, according to the light I had; but the time was now at hand when I should see all things in a greater light, and should make decisions which have been my stay and strength until this present day. It came about in this way:

At Covington, in my church, was held a revival meeting, conducted by Rev. E. M. Stanton. The evening services were addressed particularly to sinners and backslidden Christians, while those of the morning were directed principally to deepen the life of prayer and per-

sonal piety of the more faithful Christians. As I had always been identified with everything which promoted religion and the interests of my church, I soon threw myself heartily into this revival, helping by prayer and personal work. God abundantly blessed me, and it was especially in the services conducted for professed Christians that I began to see my need of being *all for Jesus,* and the great responsibility of my soul's welfare, as well as that of my fellowmen. So after the close of the revival there remained impressed upon my heart and mind some great truths which transformed my whole life, and from which, by the Grace of God, I have never receded.

As I have said above, I was then in the Junior class at college, and it was most natural for my father to expect that I should begin to have some definite ideas about a profession in life, and he from time to time spoke of it. Finally, I decided to become an architect, and as there was then at Emory a course embracing some of the more elementary principles of architectural drawing, I added it to my other studies. But all this had been done without considering whether God wished it or not—done more or less because my father wanted me to have some profession and because it was time to be planning something, as college days would soon be over.

Now, the Grace of God so illuminated my mind and filled my heart with love for Christ Our Lord, that I began to see that I could never consent to give myself to a secular profession. I had been redeemed, and at what price! Nothing less than the Blood of the Son of God had been poured out for my ransom. After such love on His part, how could I ever be content not to give to Him soul, body, and all my time, my whole life? I also read the Holy Scriptures with avidity, and prayer became the delight and consolation of my life. Christ became the companion of my inner life, and each day after the duties of school were over, I would seek a time and place of quiet for prayer and meditation on Divine things. So

real was He to me and so great my joy to be thus able to talk to Him, I arose sometimes at night to commune with Him.

The pastor at that time of the Methodist Church in Covington was the Rev. J. A. Timmerman, a true and dear friend. He, knowing how profoundly I had been moved during the recent revival, took a deep interest in my spiritual welfare and did what he could to foster in me an intense spiritual life. He had a splendid library, consisting of many choice religious books, and these I devoured. The perusal of such a book as Baxter's *Saint's Rest* lifted me so above this world that I longed to depart and be with those blessed ones who behold Christ face to face and enjoy eternal bliss.

I had become fully awake to the truth that this present life is transient and but a preparation for eternity, and that the man who neglects the salvation of his soul is mad. As time went on, more and more did I feel that I could never enter a secular calling, howsoever good it might be. For God in His great goodness had caused me to taste the joy of heavenly things "and the powers of the *World to Come,*" and consequently nothing of earth could ever again satisfy me. Christ had become the centre of all my being—His interests were mine, His Kingdom mine, and He my Glorious King.

About this time a friend gave me a little book called *Kept for the Master's Use,* which treated of personal consecration to the Lord of all the powers of body and mind, in order that He might use them for His glory and the salvation of souls. I was so determined to be all His, that I wrote out a form of consecration by which I gave myself irrevocably to Him. As I now look back over the intervening years, I thank God that I have never retracted it for a moment; and if there has been another deeper and more solemn consecration of myself to Him, as in my vows of Religion in the Catholic Church, it is only the precious and mature fruit of that earlier conse-

cration back there in the days of my young manhood. All my prayer, reflection, the Grace of God—*all* in a word, moved me to become a minister of the Gospel, so that I could give my whole life to Christ and the salvation of souls.

But now with this decision came a great cross, that is to tell my father of my purpose. I was the eldest child and only son at that time, my younger brother having died; and my father looked forward to the moment when he should see me launched forth into my career; business was first and everything to him. O what hours of anguish and prayer it cost me! But God gave grace and courage, so I told my father humbly and frankly of the great obligation weighing upon my heart and of my changed views of life. He was outwardly kind and patient, but I knew that it was only in appearance, for as soon as he was alone with my mother he gave full vent to his disappointment and chagrin.

At the end of my Junior year I spent the ensuing vacation in helping Rev. E. M. Stanton in evangelistic work, such as camp meetings, revivals and tent meetings, in different towns of North Georgia. Truly nothing gave me greater pleasure than to see sinners repent and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. When I had completed my Senior year at college and had spent the vacation days as in the previous year, I went in the fall of 1898 to Vanderbilt University, at Nashville, Tenn.—which at that time was under the jurisdiction of the Southern Methodist Church—to study theology, and thus fit myself for the ministry. At the university I passed two years completing the Minor Course of Theology. During my residence in Nashville I came in contact with a band of earnest Christians, who being tired of the worldliness and coldness of their respective churches, and longing for a deeper and more intimate life with God, had organized themselves into a Mission with headquarters at Old Tulip Street Methodist Church, where they held their services

and gave themselves to much practical Christian work. Naturally, their tenets, as far as doctrine is concerned, varied much; for the spirit of division in Protestantism is ever the same, whether in greater or lesser sects; but the zeal and earnestness of these young men attracted me and was more a recommendation for their doctrine than anything else could be.

Now, one feature of their work was foreign missionary activity; consequently I had occasion to hear now and then a returned missionary tell of the great need of the Gospel in pagan lands. At Emory College missionary interest was not lacking. In fact, for one of my declamations before Dr. Candler and the class, I had chosen as a theme Foreign Missions, and the Doctor had warmly commended the oration. Moreover, at Vanderbilt University there was an organized branch or chapter of the Student Volunteer Movement. I mention all this in order to show what missionary influence was brought to bear upon my life. Nothing more fully expressed my ideal at that time and expresses it yet than the words of two well-known Protestant missionaries, *viz.,* Henry Martyn, who said: "Let me burn out for God;" and Carey: "Not where I am needed, but where I am needed most." There were multitudes of workers in the homeland, but so few to go abroad to the needy and difficult harvest-field of foreign missions. Why should I remain at home? Did not Christ need me abroad? How could I refuse Him Who had given up all the glory of Heaven in order to bring to us the glad tidings of redemption? Love for Him won in the struggle, for struggle it was for a time. For me to become a Methodist minister had been a hard blow for my father, and when I told him of my intention of going to China (as that field of labor appealed to me most), it was a veritable climax of disappointment of all his hopes.

The Mission at Old Tulip Street Church, at that time, sent both their missionaries and missionary contributions

through the Christian and Missionary Alliance, whose soul and leader was the late Dr. A. B. Simpson, of New York City. In the Alliance were many godly and zealous men and women laboring in several mission fields. What attracted me powerfully was their life of comparative poverty and great confidence in God, as they received no guaranteed salary, together with their life of spirituality. In a word, they endeavored to follow a life of great simplicity and "literally conformable to Scripture" in several points of doctrine. This last fact I mention, merely in passing, to call attention to the fact that great earnestness and *extreme conformity* to Scripture (alas! falsely interpreted) do not hinder Protestants from falling into error. For there is but one official interpreter of Holy Writ and its application to the Christian life, and that is the Catholic Church. Outside of her, people with the best of intentions go astray doctrinally. It is a fact too evident to discuss.

Before going to China I spent several months at the Missionary Training Institute of the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Nyack-on-the-Hudson. There I passed through a kind of novitiate, attended lectures upon the Holy Scriptures, studied foreign missions, the different fields, methods of work, conversed with returned missionaries, and did all I could do to nurture my vocation and perfect myself for my future work.

Finally, in the spring of 1901, the year following the memorable Boxer Uprising, I arrived in South China, my soul aflame with the desire to preach the Gospel to the Chinese. My first task was to master the language, which no one who knows anything about it will say was an easy one. We were given about two years to devote to language study, but even before the lapse of the second year I began to render efficient service. I lived in the interior of China, at Kivei Lin, the capital of the Province of Kwang Si, and wishing to reach as many people as possible, I tried to conform largely to Chinese customs, by

adopting their dress, shaving my head and wearing the queue, eating native food, etc. "I became all things to all men that I might save all." My work at this time consisted of preaching in the street chapel, on the streets, distributing copies of the Gospels and tracts, and making occasional evangelistic journeys to other towns, villages and market centres.

In 1903 I was married to Miss Martha A. Beeson, who had come to China to do mission work among the women. How faithfully she fulfilled her mission has been told in her biography, *A Missionary Heroine of Kwang Si, China.*

Between Wuchow and Kivei Lin is a city called P'ing Loh, which had not yet been opened to the Gospel. I was sent there by the Mission to open a station, and, as we were the first white people to reside there, we had no easy task, and some of the difficulties are told in the book mentioned above. Two or three years later I was sent with another missionary to open a chapel at Fin Cheo Fu, a city still more remote and in a district overrun by brigands. There my wife and I lived and worked until our first furlough to the homeland in 1907. My father passed away several months after my return to the U. S. A.

The time of furlough was spent partly in rest, of which we were sadly in need, as we had been passing through all the difficulties incidental to hard pioneer mission life in the interior of China, and partly in preaching, and giving lectures on foreign missions, especially in reference to China. When we returned to China we had plans for a larger development of the work at Fin Cheo Fu, both among the men and women; plans which we ourselves never had the pleasure of fulfilling, as my wife passed away two years after our return to China and I went again to America, and while there wrote her life and published it.

Now, all this time I had not the slightest doubt as to the Protestant faith; but years of experience had taught me something, and I saw clearly that the work of the Chris-

tian and Missionary Alliance was too ephemeral; and that it not only lacked unity of doctrine, but held errors; was poorly organized and carried on. So when it was suggested to me by Bishop Candler to return to China under the jurisdiction of my own Church, it seemed providential, and I gladly accepted it.

Having for some time desired to visit Europe, I returned to China in 1912 by that route. During the tour I visited England, Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, sailing from Naples for Shanghai. On the Continent I was, of course, in continual contact with the Catholic Church, but I was too ignorant of her teaching and too bigoted to appreciate the religious aspect of much that I saw. Consequently all the beautiful cathedrals and churches I visited, even at Rome, where I prolonged my stay, had no *conscious* religious effect upon me *for the moment,* and I viewed them all from a purely historic and artistic standpoint; though later the impression made then had its influence upon me. I considered the Catholic Church little better than paganism, a cult corrupt and superstitious. Had I not heard that all my life, and also been taught in theology, that Rome had corrupted the primitive and pure faith of Christianity? While at Rome I even refused to accompany a party of friends who had procured letters permitting them to assist at an audience of Pope Pius X. O! how I now regret it and shall regret it all my life!

I arrived in China in October, 1912. Once more among the people I love and to whom I feel God has ever called me to labor. I was given a most cordial welcome by my fellow-missionaries of Shanghai, Suchow, Huchow, and elsewhere, and was soon busy with my mission work. As I preferred parish and evangelistic work, I was appointed to a circuit on the borders of the Cheh Kiang and Ngan Hwei Provinces, with headquarters at Huchow Fu in Cheh Kiang. I had four chapels which I visited regularly, and was aided by several Chinese ministers and cat-

echists. I threw myself most heartily into the work, as I had always done. I preached, baptized, celebrated the Lord's Supper, visited my Christians in their country homes, now and then held special services for them, when the farming conditions would allow them to attend. I spared neither time nor effort to help them along the ways of the Christian life.

As the chief means of travel in that part of China is by water, the mission gave me the use of a small native boat, barely large enough for a Chinese bed, chair, table, and, in addition, also places for my Chinese cook and the boatmen who rowed. When at home in Huchow and during my trips back and forth to my chapels, especially in the rainy season, when it was impossible to do very much, I spent the spare moments in reading and study. Now, during most of my previous mission life, spent in Kwang Si, as I have already remarked I was married, and as we usually had other young missionaries living with us, I was kept busy with other things, as looking after the needs of the newly arrived missionaries, helping in their language-study, etc. Now, this time I was alone, no temporal responsibility of any kind except my own, which was easily supplied.

About a year after my arrival in China I began to read anew the history of the Christian Church, the same that I had studied at Vanderbilt University when a young seminarist. I had always loved Church History, and the recital of the triumph of the Christian Faith over heathen Rome and its extension throughout the world had an ineffable charm for me, and it kindled in my heart a most ardent desire to follow in the footsteps of the great missionaries whom God so marvelously used. But, of course, at the time, I was a young theologian, I was ardent and without experience, but had much zeal. Alas! In many instances, zeal without the necessary knowledge. But, now, at thirty-six years of age, I was better prepared to appreciate the just value of many things to which

I had before been blind. Indeed, twelve years of practical experience in a laborious and difficult mission field, more extensive reading and study, wide travel, were all means which enabled me to regard the religious world with a maturer mind and to consider anew some of the serious problems which force themselves upon thinking people.

Now, one of the first things to strike me with a new view was the very ugly aspect of the Protestant Reformation. In the light of plain historical facts, I saw, as *never before,* all the glaring inconsistency of Martin Luther and the rest. For the very principles which they claimed to be Divinely called to maintain and defend, they continually denied in word and deed; and if Catholic Sovereigns used strong measures against heretics, Luther did not fail to employ the same arm of force against Catholics, and would have gone further if he could, but the Catholic party was too strong. If any one thinks that Luther, Calvin, or Henry VIII. were lenient and merciful, let him read the facts of history, and if he thinks they were paragons of virtue, let him consider their moral side. I speak with reverence when I say that it seems as if the omnipotent God was surely in difficult straits to find suitable instruments to effect His work, if He was obliged to use an apostate monk, who had broken his vows of Religion, and who permitted Philip of Hesse to have two wives at the same time for *no* other reason than pure *sensuality;* or a "muchly married" King, whose lust, divorces and murders recall the execrable house of the Herods; or a cold-blooded Calvin, who watched from a half-opened window the dying agony of Michael Servitus, whom he himself had condemned to be burned at the stake because he denied the dogma of the Trinity.

The next thing which had the most powerful influence upon my mind was the doctrinal dissension among the "Reformers" in reference to the Sacraments, and especially as to whether Christ was really present in the Holy

Eucharist or not. This was the great wedge which split them into hostile camps. Luther, with all of his daring, could never be brought to deny the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in this most holy Sacrament. He said that he could not withstand the force of the Holy Scripture and the witness of past centuries in its favor. Had he been as honest as to the other dogmas he denied and derided, he would indeed have done better.

The problem forced itself upon me: What if the Roman view of this question is after all the right one? And certainly it is the view held by the Christian world for sixteen centuries, and which the greater part, and that the most representative of historic Christianity, holds now and more firmly than ever. Then, if this view is true, what a farce and travesty is my celebration of the Lord's Supper! What opened my eyes still more, was that as I searched into the earliest records of the Christian faith, as they are given by Protestant historians, even Dr. Schaff, for instance. I was astonished to find the *admissions* they are compelled to make, that the early Christians regarded the Holy Eucharist not only as a sacrament, but also a *sacrifice*.

When in the course of my reading I came to study the vicissitudes of the Protestant Church in England, the Oxford or Tractarian Movement claimed a special interest. The more I read, the greater my interest became in the great questions which agitated the soul of J. H. Newman and led him to renounce the English Church and enter the Roman. I began to realize what is meant by Sacramental Christianity, and I saw that it had ever been the Christianity of the past.

About this time a missionary friend of the American Episcopal Church loaned me several books, among which were one or two of Bishop Gore's, that gave me additional light upon Sacramental Christianity. My soul was fully aroused; I longed to know the truth. Moreover, I felt compromised as a minister of the Gospel; for did I not

baptize and celebrate the Lord's Supper continually and yet did not know what I ought to believe and teach about these rites? I knew, of course, what the Methodist Church taught; but its teaching was so utterly foreign from that of early Christianity that I soon began seriously to doubt its tenets. I had attended also services at the Anglican Cathedral in Shanghai, and had been impressed with the reverence and solemnity of the services—in such marked contrast with the "free and easy" way the Methodists and other Protestants, who dislike ritualistic forms, conducted theirs. Ceremonies express some of the profoundest truths of the Christian faith, and it seemed to me that such a service was far better suited for public divine service than that of non-conformists, whose rituals and forms often vary more or less according to the temperament and ability of their ministers to pray, preach and conduct services as the "Spirit moves them."

I said I felt compromised, and so I *was;* for while the Chinese are not Christians, yet that does not hinder them from being *logical.* A simple catechumen can ask legitimate but embarrassing questions. For instance, take Baptism, a rite practiced by Protestants in China as elsewhere. Now, I have known Chinese Christians to be mystified why a Baptist Christian, who happened to be present in a Methodist chapel during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, could not partake of the consecrated elements with the Methodist brethren and had either to remain at the back or retire. "Was he not also a Christian? Had he not also been baptized? Is Baptism necessary for salvation or not? Methodists baptize little children, Baptists do not; why? One pours on the water or immerses, the other holds tight for immersion only; is one form more essential than the other?"

Now, a poor Chinaman who wants a solution to these and other vital questions concerning the Christian faith, simply cannot find any better response in China than in

America, as all Protestant sects propagate in China their differences of opinion and belief as in America.

Protestants in all lands, especially in China, feel this glaring and vital defect of their system, and hence the many conferences at Shanghai and elsewhere, Inter-Church movements, etc., to bring about some kind of *doctrinal unity*. For it is indeed embarrassing to appear in a heathen land as a missionary and not be able to give more authority for the doctrine one preaches than personal opinion. The longer I remained in China the more was my heart made sick over this sad condition of affairs; and yet I was a pastor of souls, a teacher of Christianity, and had, of course, my Methodist and *other views,* as well as other missionaries had theirs.

This actual condition of the Protestant Church in China was forcing me to try and find out which one among the many bodies professing themselves Christians was the genuine, authentic, authorized representative of Jesus Christ and His teachings. There were Roman Catholics; Greek Catholics; High, Low and Broad Church Anglicans; Methodists; Baptists; Presbyterians; Congregationalists, etc., etc., all claiming to be true, yet not only not agreeing in doctrine, but actually opposed to one another upon the most vital questions. One thing was at least certain, *viz.,* that they all could not be right, *for truth is one.*

Up to this point I had read only Protestant books and now, for the first time, I opened a book written by a Catholic; a Catholic to whom I owe more gratitude than I shall ever be able to express. I refer to John Henry Newman, and the book is his famous *Apologia.* I read and re-read it with the keenest interest, and it tended to augment my thirst to know the truth. In the public library at Shanghai, I found several other works of Newman's such as *Present Position of Catholics in England, Essays, Sermons,* etc.

Wishing very much to read the last book Newman wrote before he became a Catholic, *The Development of*

*Christian Doctrine,* and not finding it in the book shops, I ordered it from England with two or three simple treatises on the Catholic faith, such as *Catholic Faith and Practice, On the Threshold of the Catholic Church,* etc. When Newman's book arrived, I read it with the greatest avidity. My previous study of sacred and profane history had prepared me fully to appreciate the thesis which Newman so ably defends in this book, *viz.,* that the Roman Catholic Church of today is none other than that of all the past centuries, and that her teaching and discipline have ever been the same. His proofs were so true and logical, that the evidence was overwhelming. I *could* not withstand it. After all, there was indeed, and there had always been *"One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church," and that Church was Rome.* I, too, saw so clearly that the Gnostics, Arians, Montanists, Donatists, and all the other heretical sects, were in their day and time, what schismatics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists are today in their relation to the one true Church, *viz., heretics.*

Now, while I have been describing the intellectual influence which was brought to bear upon my mind, I have said nothing about the struggle of my heart; it often happens that one's intellect is convinced long before the heart is willing to yield assent. All this light which had come to me plunged my heart and soul into the greatest anguish; for I saw so clearly that if Rome was what she claimed to be, there was nothing left for me to do but to become either a Roman Catholic or turn my back upon the light. But how could I dare turn against the light? Ever since I had given myself to Christ at nineteen years of age, I had never retracted it, and I had never refused to do God's Holy Will when convinced of it—in a word, I had never sinned against light. Would I dare do it now? And if I should, what would become of my immortal soul? *No,* I could not afford to do that; for I had loved and served Him all my life and He had always been,

O, so good to me. Moreover, if I could find His true Church, I wanted to become a member of that Church, and that alone.

In that state of mind I had no one to whom I could turn for counsel and comfort, as I was in the interior of China, and I could not conveniently visit a Catholic priest without giving rise to suspicions concerning my tendencies towards Roman doctrines. Besides, in several friendly discussions with my fellow-missionaries in reference to the need of some authority in religious questions, I saw that discussion did no good, but rather irritated them. For they were so thoroughly imbued wth spiritual independence and the principles of "free examination," that they could not bear to hear of such a thing as religious authority outside of one's self.

This was in the spring of 1914. I looked forward to the time of vacation, when I should be able to go to Shanghai and have time and opportunity of discussing matters with a Catholic priest. For, in fact, I had now read and studied until I was in need of some competent person to whom I could propose various difficulties and objections. I must go to some well-instructed Catholic, for I well knew the futility of talking with Protestants, as I was (I say it without boasting) as well informed as the majority of them, and even better so, on many questions which were bothering me.

When summer came I refused all invitations to go with friends to Moh Kon Shan, the summer resort of the missionaries; and, instead, engaged a room and board at a place in Shanghai, where I could be quiet to read and reflect and pray. I was fully determined to know the truth if it were possible, cost what it might. The day after my arrival in Shanghai I visited St. Joseph's Church and asked to see the pastor or Father in charge. I was introduced to the Rev. Peter Bornand, S.J. He was a Swiss and spoke besides French, German and English, and for that reason, among others, had been placed in charge of

St. Joseph's, in order that he might minister to the varied community of foreigners such as is found in a cosmopolitan city like Shanghai. He was most affable and kind. I told him frankly that I had been studying for some time the claims of the Roman Catholic Church and wished to continue; did he have any useful literature he could let me have? He said yes, and that it would be more useful still to have a talk together now and then, so that I might expose to him my difficulties, which he would try and solve the best he could. I soon saw that he was thoroughly sincere and candid, and had no desire to conceal anything nor dodge any historic or other difficulties which I proposed to him. During the days that followed our first meeting, he loaned me books treating of various dogmas of the Catholic faith. We also studied the Catechism, which he explained article after article. We had many and long talks together. In a word, he treated me just as I, a Protestant pastor, was in the habit of treating the many Chinese who came to me at my chapels to inquire all about the Christian faith as I taught it.

At the same time he was also *unconsciously* showing me the nobility, elevation, sincerity, learning, self-abnegation, grandeur and holiness of the Catholic priesthood. How different from my deformed and preconceived Protestant ideas! I profited well of my opportunity, for, I think, during the course of our various conferences, I mentioned all the reasonable and unreasonable objections I had ever known or could think of against the Catholic Church. I was astonished to find how *utterly false* were all my hostile conceptions of Catholicism, and how ignorant I was of what the Church believed, taught and practiced. But how could it have been otherwise? I had never had even a Catholic friend, and all I had heard and learned in earlier days was through Protestant sources. Now, at last, I was in a position to see both sides of the queston and judge impartially as to which was right.

I knew the Holy Scriptures very well, and I saw from that standpoint in reference to such important questions as Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, the promise of Infallibility made by Christ to St. Peter, the power to absolve from sin, etc., that the Catholic Church had the best of the argument, and that Protestant exegetes had warped and twisted the Scriptures to prove theories utterly foreign to primitive Christianity. And if they treated the inspired Word of God thus, it is not surprising to find that they garbled, misquoted, and rejected wholesale the Fathers of the Church. This so-called "Reform" had resulted in an absolute denial of some of the most common doctrines of the Christian faith! Indeed with their preconceived theories and system of eclecticism, those "Would-be Reformers" had set up a Church which Christ and the Apostles had never known. More clearly than ever was it borne in upon my mind, that the Christian religion being a divine revelation, and not a system of human philosophy, was bound to have but one meaning, and in order to preserve that message incorrupt, some official authority was *absolutely necessary*. If God had confided the preservation of the faith to numerous discordant sects, it was a fact too evident to deny that one could any longer know the contents and import of the original revelation made by Christ.

At the close of my stay in Shanghai I returned to Huchow with my heart heavily burdened. To add to the weight of my cross, I had been told by my mission authorities that I would be most likely chosen to represent my church as a professor in the Protestant University at Nanking. As it was explained to me at the time, the different Protestant sects interested in the University wished to send there for Biblical and theological study young Chinese ministers from each respective mission; moreover, each mission would furnish a foreign and Chinese instructor; in matters in which there was no conflict of doctrinal belief and practice the students could

attend classes in common, but those particular tenets which distinguished each sect would have to be taught separately to the students of each mission. It was indeed a promotion for me and an enlarged sphere of usefulness which formerly I would have been pleased to accept had God so willed. But now with my changing views the very thought of such a thing did but add to my anguish and difficulties. I also began to receive letters filled with alarm and grief from my family in America, to whom I had, of course, early written about the change I was undergoing. They implored me by all that was dear and sacred never to enter the Roman Catholic Church. Truly, my cup was full. The renunciation of the church which I had loved, together with all the dear friends of my past life, my beloved mission work, with the pain and grief that I would inevitably cause my family, all formed a cross whose weight I felt would crush me. And, indeed, it so bore upon my spirit that I could no longer successfully conceal from my nearest friends that something serious was troubling me. Finally, the young physician of the mission, a good and sympathetic friend, asked me what my trouble was and if I needed any medical aid. I thought best to open my mind frankly, and I did so, making him promise to say nothing of it to others before I gave him leave to do so. Naturally, he was astonished beyond measure, and had long and serious conversations with me; but to no effect, for he was more skilled in medicine and surgery than Church history.

The days wore on and I realized that the approaching Annual Conference would force me to a decision of some kind. I had ever been honest with God, myself and my fellowman, and now that I was so far removed from Protestant principles, I would not sincerely accept another year's appointment. The Bishop who presided at the Conference came to see me, and with him the Secretary of the Board of Missions, whom I had known in America, a good man and sincere friend. It seemed fit-

ting that I should speak to him first, so I made an appointment with him as soon as it was convenient. Feeling that I should have something definite to present to him in order that he might know just where I stood doctrinally, I prepared a list of ten or more points of distinctly Catholic doctrine which I could prove from the Bible and the *Bible alone.* The next day when I called upon him, I prefaced my conversation by saying that I had a matter of the greatest importance to speak of, and that he must hear me with great patience until I should have finished. He did so and was most kind and charitable, but, of course, utterly dumbfounded when he knew of all I had been passing through, and read to him the various points of Catholic doctrine which I was obliged to admit. I then said how was it possible to continue in the mission with such decided belief in Roman doctrine. He replied, of course, that something would have to be done, but that he needed time for reflection. At the close of our interview he suggested that we pray; we knelt down and both he and I prayed, the substance of our petitions was that God would vouchsafe to guide us by giving light and wisdom and manifesting His will to us.

Later, in another conversation, he told me that the best thing that suggested itself to him, was that I should return to America and pass some time in the bosom of my family, where I could have quiet and rest; that I had been in China this time *all alone,* working hard, reading and studying too much, hence was tired and nervous, and if I could be at home for several months in normal conditions, all those "Catholic ideas" would *vanish.* He was sincere and really hoped thus to remedy the whole difficulty. Moreover, knowing that if the knowledge of it should come to my brethren and others, it would compromise and hurt my influence as a Protestant minister; he said that he hoped to save me if it were possible from such an erroneous step, and, therefore, that I should speak to no one else about it for the time being, and it would be

easy to arrange for me a leave of absence, as the doctor, knowing the condition of affairs, could easily certify that my health warranted a period of change and rest. O, how can I ever describe the anguish of my heart those days! I saw all slipping away from me, and I knew it was the beginning of the end. I realized fully the price I should have to pay to become a Catholic. I was like a vessel, which, having left one port, tossed by wind and wave, has not yet reached the haven of safety. As the Annual Conference of my Church was held at Shanghai, I thus had an opportunity of seeing Father Bornand, and I remember saying to him that I feared I should lose my mind, so great was my suffering. He said: "Do not fear, God will never abandon you." At the Conference I was appointed home on furlough for rest. I returned to Huchow to prepare for my journey. I packed my library in such a way that it could be easily shipped later; for I felt in my inmost soul that I should never again return to China as a Protestant.

During my homeward journey I traveled in company with the Bishop and his wife, who were also returning to the U. S. A. I never spoke to him of the great question which was agitating my soul to its profoundest depths. Once only, in a passing conversation, I mentioned the fact I had been reading some of J. H. Newman's books, and that I felt more and more the imperative need among Protestants of some religious authority. He gave me to understand that the works of Newman were dangerous and not acceptable reading matter, but, of course, did not prohibit my reading them, as no Protestant superior may do such a thing; their very principle of "private examination" precludes all such prerogatives. At Honolulu I visited the Catholic Church and met there a young Belgian, a religious, who gave me a copy of *The Question Box*, a little volume published by Father B. L. Conway, of the Paulist Fathers. I found it full of good and useful knowledge, as it answered in a splendid way, from a

Biblical, traditional and historical standpoint, many of the old and hackneyed objections of Protestants against the Church of Rome. I read it with profit during the remainder of my voyage.

As I neared my native land, my heart, although it rejoiced in the anticipation of seeing once again my loved ones, was crushed by the thought that I was going to bring sorrow upon those whom I loved more than life. I would rather have gone anywhere else, for I well knew my home-coming would only augment their perplexity and sadness. Of course, I was received with the greatest love and tenderness that a dear mother and sisters can bestow upon a son and brother greatly loved. But as soon as the Catholic question was mentioned, my dear mother, who had never opposed me in anything in my religious life, now set herself, seconded by my sisters, most strongly in opposition to all I could say; opposition which I felt the more keenly, because it came from such *loving and sincere hearts,* which were solicitous only for my good. And so when the first Sunday morning came and she asked me to accompany her to church, as in the old days, and I refused, it was indeed hard for her and me also. But how could I do otherwise? I had lost all faith in Protestantism, and I felt what a *travesty* the celebration of the Lord's Supper was, and I did not wish to be present at a rite which everything proclaimed to be false. And what did my ordination as a minister amount to? Absolutely nothing but an empty form or ceremony.

Finally, seeing that discussion was useless, they left me alone in peace. I visited often the Sacred Heart Church on Ivy Street and that of the Immaculate Conception on Hunter Street. O! how blessed to steal in there for prayer, where, surrounded by the sacred memorials of my Lord's Passion and Death, I could find that rest and refreshment which He has promised to those who are burdened! Above all, what a privilege to kneel before the High Altar, where He as a King upon His throne,

was actually, really and bodily present in the Blessed Sacrament, and deigned to receive me, His poor subject and slave, and let me talk to Him! Too, I can never forget how sometimes, when present at High Mass and the choir was singing the *Credo,* my soul would be moved to the profoundest depths. For I knew that glorious symbol of the Christian faith had been sung by the Saints of God for ages and ages; to them it was indeed a true expression of that "faith once delivered to the Saints;" and when they chanted it they believed it with all their heart and did not attempt to rob it of its original meaning, nor mutilate it as a party in a recent General Conference of the Methodist Church had attempted to do by proposing to strike out or change the words "Holy Catholic Church." I mention this to show how little respect the Protestant Church has for the most sacred things of primitive Christianity. Were it not for the Catholic Church, the Holy Scriptures, dogmas, symbols of the faith, etc., all would long ago have been reduced to nothing, and the original meaning of the Revelation which the Son of God brought to earth would have disappeared, as indeed it has disappeared among the Protestant sects, for their multiplicity of divisions and creeds is an ever-present witness against them.

Before leaving China I had begun to make the Sign of the Cross and to genuflect before the Tabernacle. Usually, at the close of our discussions Father Bornand would pass into the Church, saying: "Let us pray a moment as we have the Blessed Lord always with us." We would then kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and pass a few moments in silent prayer. When I had reached San Francisco I had bought a rosary and a Catholic copy of *The Imitation of Christ.* I had known this little book in former years, as it was one of the first which John Wesley had published for the use of the Methodists, though, of course, without the fourth book which treats of the Real Presence and Holy Communion.

In my home with my dear mother and sisters I tried to rest as much as possible, but at the same time I continued to read and investigate a subject which I knew was of *greater importance* than anything else in this present life. I found some books in the Carnegie Library which also helped me. Finding there some of the works of Dr. Schaff, I was notably impressed by the *quotations* he gives taken from early Christian Apologists, Fathers of the Church, Creeds, etc., as they showed so clearly that the faith and practice of the first Christians was the same as that taught and believed by Rome today. Once or twice I went to see a friend whom I had known for years and in whose learning and piety I had great confidence; and not wishing to "leave a stone unturned," as we say, and, above all, not to be hasty, I opened my heart and mind most freely to him; and in answer to some of the most serious difficulties I received only sarcasm and ridicule. Now, ridicule stings, but it only dodges the issue; it does not solve the problem. After a painful conversation of that kind I parted with him, saying that unless I saw matters otherwise there was nothing to do but enter the Catholic Church; for everything showed that *She, and She alone,* was the true Church of Christ. I returned home realizing how true it is, that a man can be wise and learned in many things and yet be an ignoramus and bigot as far as knowledge of the Catholic Church is concerned.

Towards the close of the winter the Secretary of the Board of Missions came to Atlanta; I told him frankly that my "Catholic ideas" instead of *vanishing* were more confirmed than ever. I realized that the time had arrived for me to sever my relation with the mission, and I did so. The officers and members had been most kind to me in every way; they had continued my salary even beyond the time when I felt that they should do so; they had given me plenty of time for reflection. It was certainly a hard blow for me. I felt the utter loneliness of my position, and all who knew of the step I was about to take deplored

it to the utmost, and did not hesitate to tell me that I had embraced the most pernicious errors and was even on the broad road to perdition. It was one of those supreme crises which comes to the soul at times when friends, loved ones, and all human help fail, and one is left in the Garden to pray and struggle *alone*. I threw myself at the feet of Him Whom I love more than life, and I implored Him to sustain and strengthen me, for He knew that I was seeking only His will and glory, and longed only to know the truth. He did, indeed, comfort and strengthen me as He had done so many times in the past.

Soon after my severance with the Mission Board I sent my credentials of Ordination to the Bishop. These steps were the beginning of the end. I next introduced myself to Father McOscar of the Sacred Heart Church. He kindly offered me the use of the library of the Marist Fathers, of whom he was the Superior. I found there many valuable books to help me. He also confided me to the care of a young priest, the Rev. Father Hebert, with whom I might continue my reading, conversations, etc. In a very short while I was introduced to the Rt. Rev. Benamin J. Keiley, Bishop of the Diocese of Savannah. In him God gave me one of the best friends I have ever had, and at a moment when I *sorely* needed a friend. He was kindness and goodness itself to me. He was deeply touched at the way in which God had been leading me into the light and truth, and invited me to Savannah to visit him.

Before leaving Shanghai, Father Bornand had given me a letter of introduction to the Very Rev. Emile Mattern, S.J., then Rector of St. Stanislaus College, Macon, Ga.; so en route to Savannah I passed a day or two with the Jesuit Fathers of Macon. There I got my first glimpse of what the Religious Life is as lived by the sons of St. Ignatius of Loyola. I can never forget the impression of that visit. The order, the holy silence that pro-

claimed the presence of God; the spiritual joy, the intense love and devotion for the Lord Jesus Christ; and for His Glorious Mother and the Saints of God; all made me cry out from the depths of my soul with Jacob of old after his night at Bethel: "This is no other but the House of God, and the Gate of Heaven."

After my arrival at Savannah it was not many days before I asked to be received into the Church; for God had gradually led me on until now in the fullness of Divine Light and Faith. That glorious Temple of Truth, the "One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church" of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, stood before my vision with such clearness, that I could hesitate no longer, and *hastened* my steps to enter within her sacred portals. May 6, 1915, at the Cathedral in Savannah, I made my abjuration of the Protestant faith to Bishop Keiley, was baptized *sub conditione* and also confirmed by him. The following morning at Holy Mass I received from the hands of the Bishop the Blessed Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If I should attempt to tell of all I have found in the Catholic Church, of the certitude of faith, of the rest for both intellect and heart, of the ineffable sweetness of Divine consolation, of a life of unceasing prayer and activity in union with Christ Jesus, of that unspeakable love which emanates from His Own Sacred Heart and is communicated to those who form His Mystic Body: if I undertook to tell of all this I would have to write a volume. Truly, everything that mind and heart can desire in religion is found in the Catholic Church, and until faith shall give place to the Beatific Vision of Glory, she is the nearest approach to *Heaven on earth.* Every day do I realize more and more Her majesty, divinity, eternal truth and glory. For I never cease to wonder why God in His goodness opened my blinded eyes. It is a mystery of His infinite love and goodness.

Of course my conversion created a stir among my old

friends. Some blamed and some *pitied* me. Those who knew me intimately, and believed in my sincerity, said that my heart was right but my head had gone wrong. Others who did not know me so well, said I had a sinister motive for becoming a Catholic. But after all it is a small matter what people say and think provided one obeys God. He will vindicate His own at the proper moment. The only regret that I have is that I came so late (thank God not too late), *but I did not know.* The lament of St. Augustine so fully expresses what I feel towards the Catholic Church, that I add it as a closing paragraph to this little recital of God's goodness to me: "Too late have I loved thee, O Beauty so ancient, O Beauty so new! Too late have I loved thee—thou hast called me—thou hast cried out, and hast pierced my deafness. Thou hast lightened, thou hast shone forth and hast dispelled my blindness. Thou hast sent forth thy fragrancy and I have drawn my breath and pant after thee, and am hungry after thee; thou hast touched me and I am all inflamed with the desire of thy embraces."

# The Catholic World

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC MONTHLY

ESTABLISHED IN 1865

## A Magazine for Clergy and Laity

¶Every Catholic should know the great social and religious problems of reconstruction.

¶*The Catholic World* covers these problems: states the principles that guide in their solution.

¶Endorsed by the Holy Father.

¶Recommended by the American Hierarchy.

*Subscription price, $4.00 a year.*
*Single copies, 40 cents.*
*Sample Copy Sent on Request*

THE CATHOLIC WORLD
120 West 60th Street
New York City

51